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Book Reviews

Pierre Vitoux, *L'Oeuvre de Walter Savage Landor*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964. \$6.95. Pp. 472.

Jean Normand, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Ibid., 1964. Pp. 397. \$4.00.

A. R. Tellier, *La Poésie de Dylan Thomas. Thèmes et Formes*. Ibid., Pp. 252. \$4.50.

The French "anglicistes," in the years which followed the passing of their great names (Legouis, Koszul, Cazamian), seemed for a decade or two to have lost the originality and the rare acumen which had traditionally characterized their long succession of great theses. Since World War II however, in their studies of English, American or German literature as of that of their own country, the younger French scholars have fully recovered the mastery which, in most fields of learning, once made it certain that there existed, on almost every subject, one French work which was preëminent. In no foreign land today is American literature, from Jonathan Edwards to Wallace Stevens and Robinson Jeffers, so carefully and richly explored. None counts as many specialized chairs of American literature. But that new interest, and the large number of specialists of comparative literature, have not depleted the ranks of French students specializing in the literature of Britain. Half a dozen Elizabethan dramatists have been the subject of a big French doctorate thesis. Shakespeare, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of his birth, received the bulky and significant tribute of some twenty-five scholars in an exceptional number of *Etudes Anglaises*. John Skelton, William Beckford, George Borrow, Walter Pater and even Conan Doyle, revered (so revealed Lawrence Durrell in the *Atlantic Monthly* of May 1965) by T. S. Eliot, have been exhaustively but elegantly treated by French professors of English. The three volumes here treated, all by young "Anglicistes" recently appointed to the Universities of Montpellier, Rennes and Clermont-Ferrand respectively, can hardly be matched by any study in English on Landor, Hawthorne or Thomas.

The volume on Landor is, and probably had to be, more traditional in character; it is modest, claims no subtle use of psychoanalysis or of stylistic probing, no biographical discovery, no drastic reëvaluation of Landor. It is detailed and patient, but never cluttered with otiose details or dallying in summaries of the contents of works discussed as used to be indulged by the authors of theses which were once expected to number five hundred pages if they were to reach the level of respectability. The life of Landor was very thoroughly explored in our time by an Englishman, Malcolm Elwin, and by an American, R. H. Super. The former quoted copiously, utilized newly unearthed letters, but was content with a somewhat exterior biography; the latter wrote a meticulous, precise, objective, but heavy-handed and cool volume on a writer who has to be treated with some warmth, if the reader is going to be lured to his works.

For not many readers are, in our time; and every criticism of Landor begins by asking the question: is he not underestimated, and why? Cannot he capture the interest of the moderns as Crashaw, Herbert or Marvell, as Swift, Boswell, Blake have done lately? "That deep-mouthed Beotian Savage Landor" as Byron called him a mischievous line of *Don Juan*, who by temperament was so little of a conventional Victorian, has suffered from the relative neglect in which the literary opinion of our time has relegated most Victorians. He has also been the victim of our excessive emphasis on a few so-called "great authors" at the expense of all others. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, more recently Shaw, Yeats, Joyce are the objects, and often the victims, of at least one scholarly volume and forty articles every year. Inevitably, their tormentors of good will must strive for subtlety, seek or impose enigmas and symbols in and upon their works, and artificially isolate them from their time and place.

M. Vitoux nowhere attempts to claim a major position for Landor among the poets of England; very fairly, he assesses him with moderation and wisdom. But we close his long study with no weariness whatever and convinced that anthologies have wronged him who is eternally represented in them by the same little gems. Some of the fragrance of the Italian scenes in the *Pentameron* and in the *Imaginary Conversations*, some of the clear-sighted courage of the author, the seduction of his elegant Latinized prose, free from rhetoric and from pedantry, are transmitted to the reader through his French commentator's appreciation. The life of that eccentric whose fits of anger and quarrelsome vexations had become legendary is related succinctly. The character of a man more sinned against than sinning and overly proud out of a conviction that many things and not a few people deserve nothing but scorn, is analyzed with sympathy. Poor Landor strove with far too many who were not worth his strife. He needed, above all, the understanding and encouraging admiration of young women and met with few of them.

Nature he loved and next to nature nudes,
He strove with every woman worth the strife,

wrote Lawrence Durrell, parodying the old lion, in *Clea*. He had, in fact, one of the noblest natures of any of his contemporaries and could be generous to Wordsworth, to Byron, to Shelley (after having refused to meet him in Italy, crediting some slanders against the younger poet). As early as 1828, in one of the *Conversations*, he paid a tribute to Keats, "Fair and free soul of poesy," and he praised the tragic power of *Death's Jest Book* when wretched Beddoes had just ended his life through poison.

The bulk of the volume is devoted to an attentive examination of Landor as a poet, as a dramatist, as an original practitioner of the dialogue which he raised to a flexible and dramatic art form, as a literary critic. It then devotes chapters to Landor's political views, to his attitudes toward religion, philosophy and ethics, to his sense and treatment of history; it concludes with a precise scrutiny of his style and of the music of his prose. Along with the grace and chiselled design of Landor's prose at its best, unmatched in De Quincey, in Walter Pater, George Moore and certainly in Matthew Arnold, among the masters of a polished, Latinized English style, some of the longer poetical achievement of Landor wins M. Vitoux's warmest praise: several of the *Hellenics*, the Virgilian descent into

hell of *Gebir*, chiefly scenes of *Count Julian*, that tragedy on a medieval Spanish theme which is better than most of Alfieri's plays and not unworthy, in parts, of *Samson Agonistes*—

Every germ
Of virtue perishes, when love recedes
From these hot shifting sands, the female heart.

With a modesty which is perhaps excessive, the author has refrained from rapprochements and parallels with other poets (Arnold, Tennyson, Meredith). These might help reach a clearer consideration of where Landor excels and where his poetical successors, in their nature poetry, in their Greek idyls or in their gnomic verse may, through his example, have shunned a certain coolness which made Landor's poetry too detached. The place of Landor among the English bards of liberty, among the singers of Italy from Rogers and Shelley to Swinburne and J. A. Symonds, and especially among those who derived perhaps too cerebral an inspiration from Greek and Latin models (Chénier, Goethe himself, Platen, Housman, Cavafis) might have been assessed by his critic to some advantage. Like Landor himself, M. Vitoux took perhaps too few risks and preferred an equal and wisely diffused light to exploring, or digging, abysses and throwing sparks.

M. Normand's remarkable study of Hawthorne bears as its subtitle in French "A Sketch for an Analysis of Artistic Creation." The author knows all that is to be known about Hawthorne; he is thoroughly familiar, not only with all the American publications in volumes and periodicals, from Henry James to Norman Pearson and Harry Levin, but with the landscape of Salem and of Concord, which he conjures up in artistic, and always relevant, passages. He offers at the outset a concise summary of Hawthorne's childhood (loss of his father, dead from yellow fever, when he was four; accident which made him lame for a while and in which he may have seen the punishment for thoughts of incest and of an imaginary murder of which he accused himself; strange wish to punish a bust of Wesley as a revolt against Protestant austerity; sarcastic spurning of the profession of pastor); he pursues, with restraint, the story of his life, his wrath when he is ejected unjustly from his post in the Salem customhouse and insulted by the adverse political party, alone against the community as Hester will be in *The Scarlet Letter*, his subsequent role as Consul in England, where he missed his native land and the charm of American women, while he vituperated in his *English Notebooks* against British females ("more atrociously ugly than any other human beings . . . , Ladies who look like cooks and housemaids . . ."); then the tortures of sterility and of creative impotence, so pathetically displayed in the manuscript of Grimshawe. The French critic is nowhere indelicate, nowhere tactlessly carried away by any speculations on Nathaniel's maternal fixation or by the fascination which he held for Hermann Melville. He sees Hawthorne as stemming, in the literary tradition, from Spencer and from Bunyan, and as anticipating Faulkner, even O'Neill, Henry Miller and Edward Albee. But he never attempts to take Hawthorne out of his time or to exaggerate his modernity.

He does, however, make use of the latest and extremely fertile contribution offered to French criticism by psychologists and psychoanalysts concerned with artistic creation: C. G. Jung, Marie Bonaparte, but chiefly Gaston Bachelard,

and Dr. Delay in his far reaching and acute study of Gide. His volume is the ablest parallel, in the field of American letters, to the already famous critical studies of French writers by Georges Poulet and Jean P. Richard, and far less systematic than either of those, because the method is applied to one author and not transformed into a key opening twenty different locks. To be sure, the peril of such an approach is not altogether eschewed: it lies in categorizing an author too easily and in pinning scientific labels on moods, frustrations, anguishes, thematic obsessions which are not necessarily illuminated for having received a name.

But there is no pedantry in M. Normand's manner, no recourse to medical jargon, no turgidness of style. Some symbols, like that of Oberon, recur too insistently and pall on the reader. The joy in creation which Hawthorne occasionally experienced, his moments of an ever young or rejuvenated elf dispelling his darker moods and his thirst for a Pagan liberation, the facet of his nature by which he appeared to Henry James as "the last of American primitives," are thus brought out by M. Normand, who avoids overstressing, as many Europeans are prone to doing, the morbid and atrociously pessimistic aspects of American literature.

Still, enough remains in this psychological inquiry into the process of grasping reality and of transfiguring it through his dreams, the promptings of his subconscious, his narcissism and his guilt complex, to justify the famous assertion of Melville in his review of *Mosses*: "This great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeal to that Calvinistic sense of innate depravity and original sin." The most searchingly profound chapters in the book (by far the most profound ever written on Hawthorne) follow the process of creation in the novelist (pp. 83-147). The themes are never dryly catalogued but interpreted in depth and with deftness in another long section: narcissism, the orphan, nostalgia of an Eden, rejection of contemporary America, fascination with and fear of woman, and such "signs" as a dark veil, mirrors, rings, red letters, pillories are deciphered with skill and delicacy by the critic. The last section, entitled "The Keys to the world," analyzes ambiguities and allegories in Hawthorne, the structure (often a recurring arabesque) of his tales and that of his novels, his oscillations from light to darkness, his language and his style. Eighty pages of notes supplement the book and buttress, too lavishly, its assertions and allusions, but the unclear manner in which they refer to chapters inside chapters and sections does not facilitate their use by the reader. All in all, this is one of the finest studies ever devoted by a European to an American writer; it should be translated without delay; its impact on Hawthorne scholarship will be lasting.

The same influences, that of Bachelard more particularly, are conspicuous in M. Tellier's shorter but very dense and rich thesis on Dylan Thomas. His tone is more peremptory; he takes no circuitous path to lead his reader to his conclusions, which are straightforward and dogmatic, but rest on a firm foundation of meticulous knowledge and of psychological method. The volume owes something to its predecessors, Elder Olson especially, and somewhat less to the commentary of the individual poems by Derek Stanford. The limits assigned to himself by the author are defined from the start: the poetry of Thomas alone concerns him, and his prose is indeed very different in character and in tone. The strict chronological order is disregarded and it is of small moment in this case. A close analysis of poems taken separately is likewise excluded, for there

are many drawbacks to such a method, whether it be the French "explication" or the stylistic examination of a few (carefully and almost perfidiously) selected texts as practised by some German and American critics. M. Tellier bravely undertakes a work of synthesis and says so. He also deliberately shuns the clearly sexual undertones of much of Thomas' poetry or at least he prefers not to dwell ponderously and tactlessly on phallic and other allusions. And, again out of decency, he leaves out altogether the biography of the poet: enough reports by contemporaries have stressed the histrionic buffoon in the Welsh poet and failed to sense under it the anguished young man, obsessed by dying, and more than half in love with his far from easeful own death.

The book is firmly organized into three main parts: Themes (and messages), Symbols, language and technique. It is fashionable to deride the traditional distinction between subject-matter and form. "What one calls subject matter," said Paul Valéry using the more appropriate French term "fond," "is but a bad form." In truth however the distinction is unavoidable in any process of analysis; but the critic's task is to study those two facets in their mutual connection, to treat form not as a garment slipped over a preëxisting content, but as welded to the so-called content by the simultaneous working of verbal obsessions and of psychic obsessions. Thomas, like many a true poet, Valéry included, often proceeded from words, symbols, rhythms. The rapprochement between him and Swinburne, which has been sketched, is not altogether unjustified.

The themes in Dylan Thomas are extremely few and not particularly original: birth, copulation, death, as Herbert Read was among the first to notice: to which M. Tellier adds childhood (in poems like "The Hunchback in the Park") and the obsession of time. Love is at the core of many poems, almost as much as it is in D. H. Lawrence's poetry: it never designates playful eroticism, cerebral jealousy, frustration or sublimation. Thomas's imagination treats with candid audacity the subjects of the womb or of the male organ, and even onanism and inversion, as in "I see the boys of Summer." The omnipresence of death, however, is even more significant; "Death is all metaphors, shape in one history" as the second sonnet proclaims. It is present at the very core of life, in sex itself. It does not seem, in Thomas' obscure and contradictory lines on the subject, to open on another life, in spite of the six times repeated refrain of the poem "And death shall have no dominion." Thomas, who has been often mentioned in the same breath as Hart Crane (whom he had not read) often seems even closer to the haughty desolation of Robinson Jeffers.

The second and central section of M. Tellier's volume follows, as did Mlle Lemaître's recent thesis on *Shelley Poète des Éléments*, the symbolic categories proposed in Bachelard's philosophical volumes: the air and the fire (fire never seems to be associated with purity in the Welsh poet), darkness and light, and particularly the green and red colors; the seasons; the earth; the liquid element (the blood, "the diver's bell," the baby immersed in his mother's being, "tomorrow's diver in her horny milk," the drowned man). Shelley, Swinburne, Rimbaud in his evocation of the drowned body seen by the drunken boat, come to mind here, as they do in the identification between nature and man's fate in the sumptuous early poem "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age."

The last chapters treat systematically, but never conventionally, the vocabulary, the syntax, the metrics and the music of Thomas' poetry, but they again relate

those elements to the psychological mysteries which any appraisal of his verse encounters: was he a verbal virtuoso, a player with words through which to reach or convey a content, or a great poet fusing substance and form together spontaneously. The critic refrains from judging; he explains and succeeds in dispelling some of the obscurity which enshrouds Thomas' poetry. A cosmic half-brother of the Surrealists, Dylan Thomas was even more a romantic, resurging in the age of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden, but certainly not an inspired bard immune to technique. His own statement in 1934, in answer to a questionnaire of *New Verse*, is confirmed by his critic: "To me, the poetical 'impulse' or 'inspiration' is only the sudden, and generally physical, coming of energy to the constructional, craftsman's ability. The laziest workman receives the fewest impulses. And vice versa."

The well known standardization of French teaching and the rigid requirements of its system have obviously not killed the individuality of students of English and American letters. Those three works, very diverse in method, approach and style, all enriching literary history from the perspectives of other humanistic disciplines, reach a rare level of originality.

HENRI PEYRE

Yale University

Serge Doubrovsky. *Corneille et la dialectique du héros*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963. Pp. 588. \$8.00.

The very title of the work indicates already the approach that the author will take. M. Doubrovsky dresses Corneille in the latest twentieth century critical attire which, indeed, rejuvenates the tragedian, for phenomenological criticism is rapidly gaining a privileged status.

Taking Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* as a framework, M. Doubrovsky fits Corneille into it. Hegel's argument, of course, is based on the Master-Slave relationship of Man with himself, with others, God or Cosmos, and in the final count Man's realization of his failures. The analysis of the first and more famous tragedies shows the hero conquering others (Don Rodrigue), himself (Horace), power (Cinna) and finally God (Polyeucte). Later plays such as *Rodogune* or *Héraclius* are interpreted in the light of the hero's freedom against Nature, and *Don Sanche* or *Nicomède* that follow would pit Nature against this freedom. The decline of the hero then comes about in the sense that he is corrupted or no longer the Master in such tragedies as *Attila* and *Tite et Bérénice* with his ultimate death and failure in *Suréna*: "La tragédie ici n'est donc pas privation du libre arbitre: le choix de l'homme demeure jusqu'au bout sa croix. Mais la liberté, *inutilisable*, est récupérée d'avance, non plus seulement par son vieil ennemi, la nature, mais par son aliée, l'histoire, qu'elle était supposée *faire*, et qui désormais *la fait*" (p. 471); hence the conflict between Nature and History with Man squeezed between the two. M. Doubrovsky is careful to call his approach existential and not existentialist, which he terms Marxist.

The inevitable transition is the differentiation with Sartre and the comparison with Nietzsche and Malraux whose heroes want the "possession de soi," "possession dans l'instant," thus "l'instant absolu est dans la mort" (pp. 502-4), criteria

for the hero that could also fit, for example, Madame Bovary and make her an existential heroine as well. As a result of this existential interpretation, Corneille is ahead of his times and has much more meaning for us than Racine: the compulsory Corneille-Racine duel comes to the fore. Since the hero fails, Corneille not only gives us a theater of absurdity but above all a theater of History "dont le sens profond constitue une élucidation de l'Histoire, en général, comme dimension de l'existence humaine, et de l'histoire aristocratique, en particulier, comme lieu privilégié de son accomplissement" (p. 492).

In his introduction, M. Doubrovsky gives a most significant quotation by Corneille himself: "une pièce de théâtre est fort mal faite quand elle ne porte point toutes ses lumières elle-même, et qu'elle a besoin d'un faux jour qui vienne d'ailleurs" (p. 26). M. Doubrovsky proceeds to say that he will present strictly a reading of Corneille in whose tragedies the dialectic of the hero is actually a thematic dialogue among the plays. But this dialogue has failed, as it must fail by definition of a phenomenological criticism, because the hero finds himself in an "immobilité immense" (p. 477). One could object then that the author did not work with the plays themselves but with the "false light" provided by Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind*, and it may be a reason for the failure. Therefore one could, and perhaps should, conclude that the true dialectic in a literary work is the one between form and content, each reinforcing the other and not working against each other. But to many French critics stylistic criticism is worthless and too subjective; phenomenological criticism is also most subjective—indeed, especially when applied to a so-called Classical author. As a matter of fact, all types of criticism are subjective, even the historical approach. If M. Doubrovsky had shown how Corneille's style fits in with the existential approach, it would have made it all the more convincing, and the critical *optique* more complete. The author, who now teaches in this country, bows slightly to American formal criticism on Corneille (p. 28) by Boorsch and May; he should have also mentioned Nelson, saying that more attention ought to be paid to it (pp. 521-2), but evidently he considers it outside his domain.

Other objections are relatively minor. Some comparisons, for example, give the impression of being far-fetched: "De même que, dans certaine littérature socialiste, l'héroïne modèle est amoureuse d'un tracteur, l'héroïne cornélienne des dernières pièces est éprise d'un trône" (p. 355). Here, of course, it appears out of context, but even in context this comparison is somewhat incongruous. The reader also wonders if over five hundred pages were really necessary to prove the argument and trace the evolutionary curve of Corneille's tragedies; at one point even, and certainly through no fault of the author, pages 273-288 are included twice. Finally, in the last part of the conclusion (pp. 512-17), Corneille is lost out of sight due to a discussion of "dialectique" and "existence pure."

However, M. Doubrovsky makes a solid and thoroughly documented contribution to Corneille studies. To the present day student and scholar, his work casts another light on the evolving kaleidoscopic body of Corneille's tragedies.

MARCEL TETEL

Duke University

Margaret Church. *Time and Reality: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963. Pp. 302. \$6.00.

Margaret Church's *Time and Reality* is appropriately subtitled *Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, for it is a series of essays about major twentieth-century novelists rather than an analysis of the conception of time as reality in contemporary fiction. The ideas of particular writers about time and such associated themes as cyclical recurrence and the relationship of past, present, and future are used as a tool for the understanding of their work and, more notably, for the discerning of a pattern of development.

Miss Church's scholarship is excellent; she is thorough, precise, judicious, and unpretentious; and she succinctly summarizes the work of previous critics when it is relevant. She sends one back to the novels or stories she is discussing (I decided to reread a great deal of Virginia Woolf), and she makes the reader put his own thoughts in order. Consequently, her book should prove valuable to the graduate student and the superior undergraduate. To the specialist and the critic, however, it is at times disappointing, for she has little which is new to say about Joyce, Proust, or Mann—an almost inevitable result of her method and subject.

I enjoyed best her essays on writers like Sartre and Virginia Woolf, partly because I had read rather than studied them, but principally because of the importance, in their work, of theme apart from technique. In Joyce the pattern of development may be easily observed; in Virginia Woolf it is difficult, especially in her last works, *The Years* and *Between the Acts*. Miss Church's plan of attack—"Employing Mrs. Woolf's own 'tunnelling process,' let us work back, starting with the figures in *Between the Acts*"—is eminently successful in indicating the development of thematic patterns in Woolf's fiction. One danger in this method, however, is the tendency to overvalue late works. An author's later fiction is not superior to earlier work merely because it shows the evolution of his ideas about theme and structure, but Miss Church's high praise for *Between the Acts* and Faulkner's *A Fable* is based almost completely on this critical fallacy.

Such minor flaws—if they be flaws—do not detract from the solid merit of *Time and Reality*. Particularly admirable is the final chapter on Sartre. Its theme—the rejection of the past and the linking of the present with the future—makes for an illuminating contrast between one kind of contemporary writer and the major writers of the early twentieth century, and the comparison between Sartre and Proust is very effective.

The usefulness of this book for students is enhanced by an excellent bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

JULIAN B. KAYE

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Three Plays by Ernst Barlach translated by Alex Page. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1965. Pp. viii + 224. \$5.50.

One of the curious phenomena of contemporary dramatic criticism is that the plays of Ernst Barlach have been consistently ignored, even by those critics who have commented at length on the other German Expressionist dramatists like

George Kaiser and Ernst Toller. This is even more remarkable since Barlach now has an honored place on the German stage and is considered by many to be the most important Expressionist German sculptor. Of course, it could be argued that his fame as a sculptor militated against his recognition as a dramatist since some critics might have immediately placed him in the category of painters like Pablo Picasso and Oscar Kokoschka who also wrote plays which are not very remarkable. (It should be remembered, however, that the Expressionistic drama was essentially the rediscovery of the stage as a plastic art.)

On the English-speaking stages the absence of productions of Barlach plays can be explained easily enough by the fact that there were no translations available. This has now been remedied by Alex Page's translation of three of Barlach's best plays of his middle period (1918-1924), "The Flood," "The Genuine Sedemunds," and "The Blue Boll." Mr. Page has also contributed a concise but knowledgeable essay on Barlach's contribution to dramatic literature. However, this is about all that exists in English save the most fugitive comments. Martin Esslin, for instance, in his book *The Theater of the Absurd* devoted but one sentence to him when he was elaborating on the fact that in the twenties and the thirties many avant garde painters and sculptors wrote plays.

It is fairly easy to see why Barlach was honored in Germany both before and after Hitler's persecution of all "decadent" artists and writers. Barlach, like Brecht and Kaiser, was a pacifist and therefore suffered the indignities meted out to all who opposed the Nazi totalitarian state. But for this very reason with the re-opening of the municipal theaters it is understandable that his plays would be frequently given.

It is also understandable that they would find favor with directors who are not afraid to offer their audiences both parts of Goethe's *Faust*. One of Barlach's most popular plays is "The Flood" which examines the strange, and frequently amusing relationship of Noah and God—one which is certainly one of the oldest themes in dramatic literature. Barlach's play, however, restates in a very original sense the relationship of man and God, particularly in the dialogues between Noah and Calan, a wholly imagined character, who represents a kind of existential assertion of self. He is wholly independent and taunts Noah for his dependence on a seemingly very fallible deity, and God himself is dramatized as an old beggar who presents himself to Noah in several guises, one of them being that of Noah's own father, and Noah assumes the role of son to his father and his God. The beggar then changes visibly from a ragged, persecuted, pathetic figure to one of such authority that he even commands the respect of Calan.

There are many minor characters in this drama that also serve to develop Barlach's theme of the intricate relationship of good and evil, characters that are expressionistic in the manner of their presentation. Barlach, however, resented all the doctrinaire manifestoes issued by the Expressionists as a group. And Alex Page reports that when he witnessed a production of his play "The Genuine Sedemunds" in Berlin in 1921 he objected very much to the "cinematic" pace used by the director for this very episodic play. One suspects that he was right, and that such a technique would have obscured the theme of the play—the distinction between appearance and reality. The play, although episodic, is not chaotic. The author permits greatly diversified and particularized characters to appear against one strange and grotesque setting after another: a fairgrounds, a beer garden, an insane asylum, a final graveside encounter with the dead. But

this, too, is not really done in an Expressionistic manner; the characters and episodes are sometimes grotesque but they are not deliberately distorted and always have a function in the play; and furthermore the play is not so dominated by the ideas presented that the characters become abstractions.

It would seem that these plays, although admittedly plays of ideas like those of the other Expressionistic Dramatists, look forward far more than any others to the "plays of the absurd" so popular in Europe during the fifties. They have the same "black humor" and the same pessimism tinged with a bleak optimism. And they have some of the same prevailing sense of the alienation of their protagonists, the same feeling that even if man cannot accept orthodox belief of any kind he can believe in man and his ability to transcend himself. It is perhaps because of this that Barlach's plays are now becoming more popular in Germany rather than the more serious (and frequently naive) plays of Kaiser and Toller. Mr. Page has rendered a service to the English speaking stage by making these plays available.

VINCENT WALL

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